

REMARKS

Claims 50, 51, 55, 56, 60-62 and 67 have been amended. Claims 50-67 are currently pending.

Claims 50-60 stand rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as being anticipated by USP 6,019,722 to Spence et al. ("Spence"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

The courtesy of Examiners Thaler and Nguyen in granting the undersigned a personal interview on February 9, 2006 is greatly appreciated. During that interview, the differences between the structure of the links 90 and 92 in Spence and the claimed beads in claims 50 and 56 were discussed. In particular, it was noted that a concave surface on the links 92 in FIG. 7A of Spence contacts the surface of the links 90. In contrast, as best shown in FIG. 3A of the present application, a convex surface of the beads 36b contacts the surface of an adjacent bead 36a. The undersigned explained that it is this three-dimensional convex configuration which allows the resulting shaft to remain flexible during any type of bending. However, the concave contact surface in Spence will bite into the adjacent bead under an axial load, thereby causing the shaft to become rigid upon certain bends. As a result, independent claim 50 has been amended to recite that the surface each of the second beads has a convex configuration in each of the three dimensions at each location where the second bead contacts the surface of an adjacent first bead. Similarly, independent claim 56 has been amended to recite that the surface of each of the first and second beads has a convex configuration in each of the three dimensions at each contact location. Thus, claims 50 and 56, and claims 51-55 and 57-59 depending therefrom, are submitted to be allowable over Spence.

Claims 61-67 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over USP 6,139,563 to Cosgrove III et al. ("Cosgrove III") in view of Spence. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

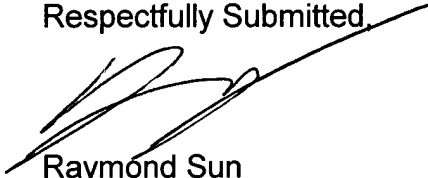
As with claim 50 above, independent claim 61 has been amended to recite that the surface each of the second beads has a convex configuration in each of the three dimensions at each location where the second bead contacts the surface of an adjacent first bead. In contrast, Spence does not teach or suggest this limitation, since a concave surface on the links 92 in FIG. 7A of Spence contacts the surface of the links 90. Thus, even a combination of Cosgrove III and Spence will not yield the claimed clamp. Thus, claim 60, and claims 61-67 depending therefrom, are submitted to be allowable over Cosgrove III and Spence.

* * *

Thus, it is respectfully submitted that all pending claims are now in condition for allowance.

The Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned if there are any matters that can be resolved in a phone conversation, or if the Examiner has any other suggestions, ideas, or proposed amendments that would place this application in condition for allowance.

Respectfully Submitted,



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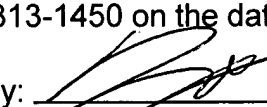
Dated: February 14, 2006

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